

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Claims 15 and 17 have been amended. Claim 23 is cancelled. Claim 24 is new. Claims 1-14, 16 and 18 remain as previously presented. Claims 1-18 and 24 are pending.

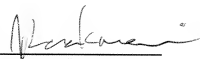
Claim 15 has been amended grammatically by removing "at least" in part (b)(ii). Claim 15 has also been amended to replace "permeate collection means" with "permeate pan" as supported by, for example, column 11, lines 28-29 and column 14, lines 50-51. Claim 15 has also been amended to recite, in part (d), "a gas-distribution system having through-passages with openings distributed both radially and circumferentially between the membranes operable to provide a flow a gas through the through-passages to produce bubbles in the substrate." This amendment is supported by, for example, column 8, line 52 to column 9, line 25. Claim 17 has been amended to correspond with this amendment to claim 15.

New claim 24 depends on claim 15 and states that the lower ends of the membranes are plugged as supported by, for example, column 12, lines 41 to 49.

The Applicants submit that the current amendments are supported by the original patent and that the claims are allowable.

Respectfully submitted,

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